

**CHAIRMAN'S REPORT ON 2023
for the
Annual General Meeting – Tuesday 26th March 2024**

The last year has been one of continued recovery for the Fellowship following lockdown during COVID. Our regular lunches at McDermott's, The Horseshoe and Ponte Nuovo have, following re-instatement after cessation of lockdown, continued to be well supported as have our regular coffee mornings in Croydon and at two of our local Garden Centres. The Coffee Morning at Chartwell has been less well attended but the Committee will continue with this event in July at least for this year and will then review the situation.

In the last year there were some notable events:-

- 1) As you all know Chris House passed away in June having dedicated his retirement years to the Fellowship – no one did more to further its aims. At the recent New Year Lunch a raffle was held and I am pleased to be able to report that the sum of £285 was raised, which your Committee decided to donate to St. Christopher's Hospice in Chris' memory. It is perhaps appropriate to also mention at this juncture the recent sad passing of Roger Smith who, whilst not a committee member, organised and led a number of walks on the south coast. Both these gentlemen made significant contributions to our regular activities.
- 2) There were excellent visits to the Museum of Brands organised by our Treasurer John Gibbons and to the Natural History Museum and Tate Modern organised by Committee Member Judy Dumbrill.
- 3) We commenced a Toby "Brunch" in October which had an encouraging start so we will continue with these to better measure their popularity. In particular we are planning an additional Toby Breakfast at the Redhill Branch to widen its appeal to those members living locally and who find Croydon inconvenient or difficult to get to. The first visit to the Redhill Toby will be on 23rd April.

After many years of valuable service to the Fellowship, Judy Dumbrill is standing down from the Committee. Judy has been an Event Organiser and Committee Member for the last 18 years. David Newland is also standing down from the Committee and will also cease his activities as our Newsletter Editor. David has been a Committee Member for the last six years, Event Organiser for 19 years and started his Newsletter activities 14 years ago. Until a replacement Newsletter Editor is found I cannot say when we will be able to recommence the issue of the Newsletter but we will of course keep members advised of events via the Website and E-Mail.

I am sure you will agree with me that these are commendable records and I would like to take this opportunity to thank both of them for their considerable contribution to the smooth running of the Croydon Fellowship. However, their involvement will not completely cease as David intends to continue leading his country strolls and Judy, for this year at least, will be leading us on another visit to the Natural History Museum to see the "Wildlife Photographer of the Year" exhibition. You may recall we made a visit to this exhibition last year which was well attended and proved to be outstanding. I thoroughly recommend this exhibition to those of you interested in wildlife – it was truly remarkable.

The departure of David and Judy does of course leave us very light on committee members and in the longer term will inevitably result in fewer organised visits. What we really require is a replacement Newsletter Editor and Event Organisers and any help that anyone can provide will be greatly appreciated. Event Organisers do not have to be Committee Members and in this

respect I am grateful to Hillary Kearney in stepping forward in offering to organise our planned trip to the Eel Pie Island Museum on the 17th July.

This does not mean that we are not seeking new committee members, far from it! – new volunteers would be warmly welcomed so please do form an orderly queue at the end of the meeting to express your interest!

You will all of course be aware by how much prices have risen in the last few years and the Fellowship is not immune in this respect. The Committee have always striven to keep costs to a minimum but concluded at our last Committee Meeting that the level of subsidy previously made to the Horseshoe, McDermott's and Ponte Nuovo lunches was unsustainable. Consequently, as evidenced by the recent Horseshoe lunch, we have dispensed with the provision of an included drink (alcoholic or otherwise) as well as applying a modest increase to the cost of some meals. However, I wish to assure you that this does not mean that subsidies have been withdrawn entirely. Subsidies will continue to be applied wherever possible – it is merely a case of cutting one's cloth to fit one's coat.

As I said in my opening remarks, my special thanks must go to Maggie for the substantial support she has given me over the last year as I have been “learning the ropes”. I also wish to thank John Gibbons for his excellent work in looking after the money and to Viv Murray for keeping a tight rein on our membership records.

Rob Hall
Chairman, Croydon Aviva Fellowship
24 March 2024